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WENDELL PHILLIPS¹

In November of last year occurred the centenary of the birth of one of the greatest and certainly the most picturesque of American orators. But, outside of an editor's note appended to an extravagant sketch of his life and labors in a recent magazine, scant reference was made to the fact. The articles and notes were evidently intended to arouse enthusiasm; but they failed of their purpose, as there was manifested very little disposition to notice, much less celebrate, the event. And perhaps this was for the best; for, when all is said and considered, Wendell Phillips deserves little from the American people. It is true his intentions were almost invariably good, his purpose noble, his sentiments lofty. But it is equally true that his plans were usually impracticable, his ideas intolerant and unjust. There is little in the story of his life than can make an unqualified appeal to the average American or to the average man anywhere. He was an anomaly; and anomalies are always interesting, rarely admirable, and never exemplars. It is customary to refer to him as a great agitator; but an agitator leads—he does not strive to create. An agitator is simply the best summation of of a general or national idea. His hammer strikes sympathetic metal. He does not waste his time in the effort to draw sparks from cold steel. The true leader is the practical man. He uses the means best calculated to correct abuses. The proverb of half a loaf enjoys a prominent place in his philosophy. If the people refuse to come to him, he imitates Mohammed and goes to them.

Phillips conforms to none of these requirements. He represented, it is true, several popular ideas—abolition, temperance, labor reform—but never in the way that the great majority looked at them. He always took the most dangerous and un-

¹ My principal authorities have been Phillips's *Speeches and Lectures*, together with the biographies of Austin, Martyn, and Sears; James T. Rhodes, *History of the United States*; Stearns, *Sketches from Concord and Apple-dore*; supplemented by the newspapers of the period, especially *The Liberator*.

inviting path to scale a height and was very likely to be aggrieved when the people preferred an easier one. When the North would not adopt his remedy for slavery, disunion, he imagined that section to be "wholly choked with cotton dust and cankered with gold." When the people would not become socialists in order to better labor conditions, he considered them tools of the monopolists. When they would not all become prohibitionists, he thought them slaves of the grog shops; and scolded the Governor and Chief Justice of Massachusetts for drinking wine at a public banquet. If anyone, striving for the same result, dared to differ from him as to the best method of its attainment, Phillips was very apt to denounce him roundly. Because Lincoln did not believe in abolishing slavery in the manner Phillips did, he was "the slave-hound of Illinois."² Seward was a time-server and an instrument of Wall Street, because his speeches were not an echo of those of Phillips.³ Webster was a traitor, a monster, a sycophant, a thing accursed, the "lowest deep", because he observed his oath to the Constitution. Horace Mann, as zealous an abolitionist as himself, he attacked bitterly because he voted and sat in Congress instead of depending solely on moral suasion as did the Garrisonians.⁴ The administration did not intend to put down the rebellion, was simply carrying on the war with a view to reëlection;⁵ had neither vigor nor purpose,⁶ because it did not follow his suggestions as to the conduct of the struggle.

Some think Phillips a great seer and prophet, and the magazine before referred to calls on all to admire his "vitality of vision". The truth is that if Wendell Phillips ever enjoys the reputation of a seer or prophet, it will be because he was so rarely correct, either in his analyses or in his prognostications, that those few occasions have an effect on the memory and attention similar to that which an oasis has on a traveller in a desert. Were the desert all green he would give it only passing notice; but, since it is not, it makes a lasting impression.

² *The Liberator*, June 22, 1860; also *Life of Garrison*, by his children, Vol. III. p. 5. Rhodes, Vol. II, pp. 434 ff. ³ Rhodes, Vol. II, pp. 434 ff.

⁴ Phillips never voted; Austin, p. 5.

⁵ *Life of Garrison*, Vol. IV, p. 110.

⁶ *Speeches and Lectures*, first series, p. 453.

In reality Wendell Phillips was one of the most short-sighted men in history. No one, it is true, excelled him in the art of crystallizing an obvious truth in a manner calculated to impress the casual hearer with its entire originality. He abounds in such expressions, "Liberty, even in defeat, knows nothing save victory." But when he has to descend from generalities to practicalities his Pegasus limps, and woefully so. His discourse is still enthralling but, to change Taine, it is not truth, though almost poetry. A glance at those wonderful speeches of his—those speeches that are among the few that justify in print the sensation they made when delivered—will amply prove this. It would indeed be difficult to find there more than four or five interpretations of contemporary American history that a painstaking historian of to-day—such as James Ford Rhodes would accept; or more than an equal number of predictions that subsequent events have verified. How anyone could imagine Phillips to possess vitality of vision after a perusal of his speeches delivered in the winter of 1861 and the speeches delivered concerning the state of the country and the cabinet during the course of the war, is more than one can understand. In the former he endeavors to prove that disunion would be beneficial to the North and the sure cure for slavery; in the latter that Lincoln and his entire administration have been a failure and that Fremont should be elevated to the executive chair. Considered solely as arguments these speeches appear as ridiculous to-day as two rather curious books that caught my attention not long ago—the one proving that John C. Calhoun poisoned Presidents Harrison and Taylor, the other that Lincoln was assassinated by the Jesuits. That large audiences could listen to such absurdities and give them applause and attention is the highest evidence of Phillips's oratorical power. Thus at New Bedford, after hearing that Fort Sumter had been fired on, he said: "You cannot go through Massachusetts and recruit men to bombard Charleston or New Orleans. The Northern mind will not bear it; you can never make such a war popular."⁷ And again: "If the administration provokes bloodshed, it is a trick—nothing more.

⁷ Austin, p. 207.

It is the masterly cunning of the devil of compromise, the Secretary of State—. . . it is policy, not sincerity. It means concession; and, in twelve months you will see this Union reconstructed, with a constitution like that of Montgomery.”⁸ On January the 20th, after describing the efforts to preserve the Union, he could say: “And why? only to save a piece of parchment that Elbridge Gerry had instinct enough to think did not deserve saving as long ago as 1789.”⁹ In 1863, he asked the question: “Judging by the past, whose will and wit can we trust?” And he answered, “None of them—I am utterly impartial—neither President nor Cabinet nor Senate.”¹⁰ And yet in the same speech, after attacking Seward and Chase and ridiculing Lincoln, he can hardly find words laudatory enough to extol Butler, the speculator, and Fremont, the incompetent. Nor were his vagaries confined to this period alone. In 1870, he ran for Governor of Massachusetts, as the nominee of the Labor and Prohibitionist parties, on a platform, written by himself, calling for the overthrow of the entire profit-making system;¹¹ and when the currency agitation arose, he proposed a scheme as chimerical as any evolved in those days of wild heresies.¹²

Some rest content with styling Phillips simply a great man. But Phillips was not a great man in the sense we term Cæsar or Washington or Chatham great men. A great man is usually a composite being. He must have more than one talent. Should one suffice to gain him entrance within the charmed circle it must be of the very highest order. When one would sum up Cæsar in a phrase, remembering the statesman, he does not call him a great general, or remembering the author, a great statesman, or remembering the orator, a great writer, but he epitomizes the whole in the one expression, “a great man”. But one encounters no such difficulty in dealing with Phillips. That he was a great orator and a good and eminently sincere man, few will dispute. But one must be a hero-worshipper indeed to give him a higher title. A man of magnificent oratorical talent, who usually stood on the right side in the wrong way, deserves

⁸ Austin, p. 209.

⁹ *Speeches and Lectures*, first series, p. 365.

¹⁰ *Speeches and Lectures*, first series, pp. 558-559.

¹¹ Martyn, p. 381.

¹² Martyn, p. 412.

little more. Praise must, of course, be given to the motives that prompted his great and disinterested sacrifices in behalf of shackled humanity. But one cannot give equal, if any, praise to the method he advocated or the crusade of misrepresentation he employed to further his purpose. A robust and healthy nationality reprobates both his disunion propaganda and his whole-souled endorsement of the sentiment that the Constitution was "a covenant with death and a league with a hell." A practical person must censure the entirely theoretical view he took of affairs even when believing and averring he was doing just the opposite. He never seemed able to realize why the abstract should differ from the concrete. If justice and progress dictated the abolition of slavery, Phillips was at a loss to comprehend why they should not immediately be satisfied. Unlike Mr. Winston Churchill's Stephen Brice, he was for ripping the dam out suddenly, even though it should drown the nation. He did not believe in drainage. So slavery should perish, it mattered little indeed to him whether North or South or both together perished with it. To Phillips compromise and delay were anathema. Emancipation through a "cataclysm of worlds" he would have welcomed. Emancipation through the less speedy but the surer, and in the ultimate analysis the infinitely better, methods of delay and compromise he scoffed at. Amputation—not cauterization—appealed to him.

Webster described exactly the mental processes of Phillips and his fellow abolitionists when he said: "There are men who . . . are of the opinion that human duties may be ascertained with the exactness of mathematics. They deal with morals as with mathematics; and they think that what is right may be distinguished from what is wrong with the precision of an algebraic equation. They have, therefore, none too much charity towards those who differ from them. They are apt, too, to think that nothing is good but what is perfect, and that there are no compromises or modifications to be made in consideration of difference of opinion or in deference to other men's judgment. If their perspicacious vision enables them to detect a spot on the face of the sun, they think that a good reason why the sun should be struck down from heaven. They prefer the

chance of running into utter darkness to living in heavenly light, if that heavenly light be not absolutely without any imperfection." ¹³

A liberal-minded man must condemn the narrow, intemperate and so often cruelly unjust manner in which Phillips treated his opponents. Emerson saw that "one end of the slave's chain is riveted to the wrist of the master." But Phillips either did not see, or failed to deem a mitigation, this fact which Clay expressed more sententiously in his famous, "Slavery is a curse to the master and a wrong to the slave." He lacked entirely that comprehensive view of Lincoln that enabled the "Emancipator" to look at slavery not only from the standpoint of the slave but also from the standpoint of the master; and to realize and appreciate the vast problem, both economic and social, that would confront the South once abolition was an accomplished fact. Rarely, it is true, has any man possessed a larger fund of compassion for the oppressed and the unfortunate than Phillips. And when Phillips felt sympathy for any cause it meant that all the energy, means, and talents that were at the command of a vigorous, generous, and richly endowed personality would be lavished in its behalf without stint or thought of recompense. In slavery days, when he was much in demand at the lyceums, he was accustomed when asked his charges, to reply: "If you want a literary lecture, the price is so and so,"—a high one; "but if you will let me come and speak on slavery I will come for nothing and pay my own expenses." ¹⁴ He always lived his principles. He was not only willing to sacrifice to them career and fortune but he religiously observed all those small details that are often more exacting. On several occasions when, because of his color, Frederick Douglass was not allowed to engage a stateroom on steamers on which he and Phillips were travelling, Phillips refused better accommodations than his friend enjoyed and spent the night pacing the deck with the colored orator. ¹⁵ His life abounds in many such incidents—all of which attest the sincerity of his motives and the nobility of the sentiments that inspired them.

¹³ Seventh of March Speech. ¹⁴ Martyn, pp. 511-512. ¹⁵ Martyn, p. 203.

But great as was his commiseration for the sufferings of others, he did not possess that loftier characteristic of Lincoln, who to a sympathy as strong and far more extensive than that of Phillips united a tolerance as profound. That Phillips should be severe is neither strange nor blameworthy. But that he should, with only one or two exceptions, accuse of perfidy and dishonor everyone who differed from him, and should pervert and misrepresent their actions with a recklessness that knew no limit, is deserving of the severest censure. There is scarcely a page of his speeches that does not contain a glaring instance of what Macaulay terms distortion of facts to suit general principles. He seemed to act on the principle that slavery and its defenders and tolerators were so vile that the wildest flights of the unleashed imagination could never hope to portray them adequately. Hence, he seemed to consider it perfectly proper to say anything and everything about them without investigation or restraint, resting secure in the knowledge that, whether fact or fiction, his utterances fell far short of the truth. That there could be such a thing as an honest difference of opinion he seemed never to recognize. He would have been utterly incapable of appraising at its full value the sentence which George F. Hoar, in his autobiography, added to his sketch of Senator Walthall of Mississippi. "It is a remarkable fact," wrote the venerable Senator, "which impresses itself upon me more and more the longer I live, that men who are perfectly sincere and patriotic may differ from each other on what seems to be the clearest principles of morals and duty, and yet both sides be conscientious and patriotic."¹⁶

Were one to form from the speeches and writing of Wendell Phillips an estimate of the public men of the score of years immediately preceding the Civil War, Macaulay's portrait of the restoration period would be almost flattering in comparison. Not that Phillips meant to be unjust. His character was of too lofty a mould to malign deliberately an opponent; although his actions on various occasions impelled the writer of the memoirs already mentioned to impugn his honesty. But he

¹⁶ *Autobiography of Seventy Years*, Vol. II, p. 190.

had one of those self-centred minds that often cannot see what is immediately before it—much less seek what can be found with little difficulty. “He had not the patience of an inquirer or the disinterestedness of a judge.”

With a nonchalance that would be amusing were it not pernicious, he accused Lincoln of crimes scarcely less heinous than those of Arnold. Webster, Clay, Everett, Choate, Seward, Greeley, Johnson, Grant, and Hayes also felt the hot blasts of his anger. According to him, Clay remorselessly sacrificed his convictions and the welfare of millions to his low ambition.¹⁷ Everett he despised as a time-server and referred to the “cuckoo lips of Edward Everett.”¹⁸ Choate he styled a political mountebank.¹⁹ Because Seward tried to save the Union he spoke of Massachusetts surrendering to New York the post of infamy before filled by her great Senator;²⁰ while he arraigned the author of the reply to Hayne for bowing down all his life to the slave power to secure the presidency,²¹ and doubted whether the vainest man who ever lived had dreamed, “in the hour of his fondest self-conceit, that he had done the human race as much good as Daniel Webster has brought it sorrow and despair.”²²

That patriotism and love of country can play an important part in shaping human conduct, it was hardest of all for him to realize; and he was constantly ascribing base and sordid motives to actions that the great majority knew flowed from those virtues alone. At the beginning of Johnson’s administration, Phillips praised him highly; but it was not long before he could neither speak nor write of him in language other than downright billingsgate. When he was entering on that course which was to make his later life a wreck, and was engaged in that most discreditable of his enterprises, the effort to make Butler the Governor of Massachusetts, he did not scruple to call the Bird Club, an organization composed of the most reputable men of Boston—for the most part friends and admirers—“a vast

¹⁷ *Speeches and Lectures*, first series, pp. 113-114.

¹⁸ Martyn, p. 495.

²⁰ *Speeches and Lectures*, first series, p. 374.

²¹ *Speeches and Lectures*, first series, p. 67.

²² *Speeches and Lectures*, first series, p. 94.

¹⁹ Martyn, p. 495.

controlling and blackmailing institution in the politics of Massachusetts";²³ although everyone else knew, and Phillips should have known, that it was one of the most potent influences in the State for good government.²⁴ Horace Greeley, or rather *The Tribune*, which amounted to the same thing, Phillips had often extolled. But when the great editor ran against Grant, in 1872, he wrote of him so harshly and unreasonably that he must have defeated his own purpose. "I never knew," he wrote, "till now of any of his eulogists so heedless and indiscriminating as ever to claim that he was a sincere man. As for his honesty—for twenty years it has been a byword with us that it would be safe to leave your open purse in the same room with him; but as for any other honesty no one was ever witless enough to connect the idea with his name."²⁵

On the old South Phillips had, to use his own expression, exhausted even the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary of scorn. Unlike Burke, he did know the method of indicting a whole people. So bitter and irrational was his hatred that he could not even praise the South of the Revolution but accounted for its patriotism on the ground,—“To merchant, independence meant only direct trade; to planter, cheating his creditors.”²⁶ Lincoln detested slavery but that did not blind him to the good qualities of the Southern people. He hated the sin but loved the sinner. Phillips, on the contrary, hated the slave, but he hated the master—hated him with an intensity that knew no abatement when that master, vanquished, dispossessed, impoverished, was straining every effort in the gigantic but also pathetic task of restoring order out of the chaos of his former grandeur. He had accepted no compromise in his battles. He knew no mercy when his principles were triumphant. He advocated confiscation and colonization²⁷ and demanded that the President's pardons be declared void.²⁸ He did not, indeed, desire to invoke

²³ Austin, pp. 262-263. (Austin condemns the expression.)

²⁴ Stearns, pp. 214 ff.

²⁵ Austin, pp. 285-286.

²⁶ *Speeches and Lectures*, first series, p. 373.

²⁷ *Speeches and Lectures*, first series, p. 547; Lincoln, second series, pp. 450-451; also Letter to Judge Stallo; McPherson's *Political History of the Rebellion*, p. 411.

²⁸ Sears, p. 277.

the scaffold because "it would sink our civilization to the level of Southern barbarism." But he could say, and that too in a speech on Lincoln: "A thousand men rule the rebellion, are the rebellion. . . . Banish every one of these thousand rebel leaders—every one of them—on pain of death if they ever return. Confiscate every dollar and acre they own."²⁹ In the same speech he charged that the assassination of Lincoln was "but the result and fair representative of the system in whose defense it was done"; and that Booth would be received "with all honor" if he succeeded in reaching the Southland.³⁰ Nor did he scruple to insinuate that the deed had been approved previously at Richmond,³¹ going even beyond Thad Stevens, who, when told that the President's proclamation implicated Jefferson Davis and Clement C. Clay in the conspiracy, said: "Those men are no friends of mine. They are public enemies. . . . But I know these men, sir; they are gentlemen and incapable of being assassins."³²

Jefferson Davis, Phillips styled "a chief of a savage horde rivalled only by fiendish aborigines in his warranted atrocities."³³ Even Robert E. Lee did not escape. "No government", he said of that hero whose Christian charm has captivated friend and foe alike so that to-day his statue stands beside that of Washington in the National Valhalla, "should ask of the South which he has wasted, and the North which he has murdered, such superabundant Christian patience as to tolerate in our streets the presence of a wretch whose hand upheld Libby prison and Andersonville, and whose soul is black with 64,000 deaths by starvation and torture."³⁴

But perhaps the unsparing execration which Phillips visited on his adversaries is best illustrated by his Fraternity or Idols Lecture, delivered on October 4th, 1859. One must almost go back to the oration on the Crown to rival the bitter invective of that speech. And yet there was something positively ghoulish in Phillips's conduct on that occasion. Webster and Choate,

²⁹ *Speeches and Lectures*, second series, pp. 450-451.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

³² Rhodes, Vol. V, p. 158, note.

³⁴ *Speeches and Lectures*, second series, p. 451.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

³³ Sears, p. 274.

both in their graves and mourned with a sorrow deep and abiding by the nation they loved and honored, formed the theme of his discourse. His famous denunciation of Choate, long a favorite of the school boy, is a masterpiece of misrepresentation, although as sheer invective, it has never been surpassed. It combines the ruthless ruin of the lightning stroke and the awesome roll of the thunder with the compressed fury of the hurricane. But "the outrageous magnificence" of the effort cannot blind us to its indecency. Perhaps its extremely bad taste might be somewhat condoned in view of the intensity and nature of Phillips's sentiments, had it been confined solely to the public life of the two great and patriotic men he so relentlessly but also unwittingly defamed. But no palliation is possible for the utter indelicacy of his jeering innuendo,³⁵ rewarded by vulgar laughter, directed at the popularly supposed dissolute habits of Webster—a tradition greatly weakened by a recent and convincing book by Mr. Wilkinson on that very subject.

But it is time to turn from Phillips the man to Phillips the orator, though the transition is an easy one, for Phillips the man was Phillips the orator and Phillips the orator, Phillips the man. He will go down in the history of oratory as the orator of the colloquial—the man who never seemed to try to soar or to thrill but who was constantly doing both. He rarely departed from the conversational tone even in his most vehement passages. But no one ever understood quite so well how to put so much range in so small a compass. He could sound the trumpet of defiance and annihilate with the thunderbolt of indignant scorn in a conversational tone. He could make the colloquial vibrate with passion, sparkle with energy and enthusiasm, glow with interest and appeal. His oratory resembled the scimitar of Saladin in its ease and the great sword of Richard in its force. Never has any orator extorted more bursts of approval from hostile and received more plaudits from friendly audiences than Phillips. It is told somewhere how, in the days

³⁵ The sentence referred to, "Take Aaron Burr. We omit his private life—it might suggest comparisons", is omitted in the speech as it appears in the edition of Phillips's *Lectures and Speeches*; but it may be found on page 16 of the pamphlet form issued in 1859 under the title, "Fraternity Lecture."

after the war, he was accustomed to test his power in a curious way. In one of his lectures he would relate in his usual off-hand manner a story about a college president who in an address to his students in the ante-bellum days, declared, "No slavery anywhere." The slavery agitation had passed away, but Phillips always put such a magical something into the words that invariably a hearty round of applause would follow. When it had ceased, Phillips would say, "You applaud—so did the students. But the President checked them and continued—'except in the slave states.'" At the time he was wont to relate this story the sentiment, "No slavery anywhere", was little better than cant, but Phillips wanted applause just at that place and he always got it.

No orator ever possessed more fecund imagination than Phillips. His oratory abounds in sparkling epigrams, striking phrases and expressions. One can find in his speeches any number of sentences almost as surprisingly beautiful as when he said of Lovejoy: "How cautiously men sink into nameless graves while now and then one forgets himself into immortality." We know of nothing that can be more profitably read by one who wishes to cultivate imagination than Phillips's speeches which, fortunately, were well reported. Indeed, his method of speaking was in a very special manner calculated to give the greatest possible play to the imagination. He was always secretive as to his manner of preparation. It seems probable, however, that it was his custom to jot down a number of points and study them well, then write out and memorize an introduction and leave the rest to the inspiration of the moment.³⁶ Such a system was bound to enlarge and perfect an already virile imagination; but it also tended to induce exaggeration and misstatements.

With wit and humor, both of which most orators lack, Phillips was generously supplied. His works are replete with telling and pleasing anecdotes, illustrations and witticisms—none of which seemed dragged in, as is so often the case. Even to-day we can fully appreciate his description of a politician. "A poli-

³⁶ Stearns, p. 196.

tician", he once said, "is a man who lives by whispering at Washington what he wouldn't for all the world have known at home, and whispering at home what he wouldn't for all the world have known at Washington, and who is politically dead the moment he is equally well known in both places."³⁷

But in spite of all their manifold beauties, Phillips's speeches are not finished productions like those of Burke or Webster. In delivery and interest he undoubtedly excelled either; but he lacked the patience and the logical depth necessary to create a sustained and elaborate argument such as that on the Nabob of Arcot's debts. The poorest of Phillips's speeches was never received with the contemptuous indifference that greeted Burke's great oration on that occasion. His best is to-day ranked far below it. Indeed, compared with the luminous oratory of Burke, Phillips's seem little better than a very refined and elevated stump oratory. But, such as it is, it will never cease to delight and to some degree instruct the sons of men.

The most famous and, in all probability, the best of Phillips's speeches is that which he made, at the very outset of his career, in Faneuil Hall.³⁸ A meeting had been called in that historic structure for the purpose of protesting against the murder of the Rev. Elijah P. Lovejoy, a reputed abolitionist, who had been shot at Alton, Illinois, while endeavoring to establish a newspaper there. On the day appointed the hall was packed by both friend and foe of the meeting. Doctor Channing spoke and offered the resolutions, which were read by B. F. Hallet and seconded by George S. Hillard. James T. Austin, Attorney-General of the Commonwealth, then took the platform and, amid cheers from his supporters, opposed the adoption of the resolutions, saying, among other things, that Lovejoy had died as the fool dieth. How Phillips had become an abolitionist, after seeing Garrison dragged through the streets of Boston by a "broadcloth mob" is too well known to bear relating. He had already turned his back on family, fortune, ambition, and all things men hold most dear; and had signaled his allegiance

³⁷ Martyn, p. 526.

³⁸ *Speeches and Lectures*, first series, p. 2.

to the cause by a speech at Lynn, Massachusetts.³⁹ He was now present at the meeting with his wife, who had had no share in his conversion. His latest and best biographer, Mr. Sears, thinks he came prepared to make a speech, although, of course, not exactly the speech he did make.⁴⁰ But twenty-five years after the event Phillips himself said: "I went there without the least intention of making a speech or taking any part in the proceedings. My wife and Mrs. Chapman wished to go and I accompanied them. I remember wearing a long surtout, a brand new one, with a small cape (as was the fashion of the day), and after the Attorney-General made his speech denouncing Lovejoy as a fool, I suddenly felt myself inspired and tearing off my overcoat started for the platform. My wife seized me by the arm and half terrified, said, 'Wendell, what are you going to do?' I replied, 'I am going to speak, if I can make myself heard.'"⁴¹

And speak he did and, although in the beginning interrupted by shouts of disapproval, his headlong eloquence soon bore everything before it, cowed or converted his interrupters, blasted the Attorney-General and carried the resolutions overwhelmingly. Never while the English language endures will be forgotten that noble passage: "Sir, when I heard the gentleman lay down the principles which placed the murderers of Alton side by side with Otis and Hancock, with Quincy and Adams, I thought those pictured lips [pointing to the portraits in the hall] would have broken into voice to rebuke the recreant American—the slanderer of the dead. The gentleman said he would sink into insignificance if he condescended to gainsay the principles of these resolutions. For the sentiments he has uttered on soil consecrated by the prayers of Puritans and the blood of patriots, the earth should have yawned and swallowed him up. . . . Presumptuous to assert the freedom of the press on American ground? Is the assertion of such freedom before the age? So much before the age as to leave one no right to make it because it displeases the community? Who invents this libel on his country? It is this very thing which entitles Lovejoy to

³⁹ Sears, pp. 37-38; Martyn, p. 81.

⁴⁰ Sears, p. 55.

⁴¹ Stearns, p. 187.

greater praise. The disputed right which provoked the Revolution—taxation without representation—is far beneath that for which he died. [Strong and general expression of disapprobation.] One word, gentlemen—As much as thought is better than money so much is the cause in which Lovejoy died nobler than a mere question of taxes. James Otis thundered in this hall when the king did not touch his pocket. Imagine, if you can, his indignant eloquence had England offered to put a gag upon his lips." [Great applause.]

Truly that speech deserves the tribute paid it by George W. Curtis when he said: "Three speeches have made the places where they were delivered illustrious in our history—three, and there is no fourth." He refers to the speech of Patrick Henry at Williamsburg, of Lincoln at Gettysburg, and Wendell Phillips at Faneuil Hall.

It will always, we suppose, be a debatable question as to just how much influence the abolitionists had in shaping the events that led to emancipation. The most impartial of American historians, James Ford Rhodes, has given us his usual scholarly estimate. He tells us: "An earnest writer and organizer like Garrison and an orator like Phillips could hardly devote themselves to a work for ten years without making themselves felt. Yet the only practical result of their labors lay in the fact that, having convinced men that slavery was wrong, they made republican voters while urging their followers not to vote."⁴²

When we remember that over a decade before Garrison began his crusade, Missouri—where slavery already existed—only entered the Union as a slave state after a compromise and a contest so fierce and sharp that, Seward afterwards said, the Union reeled under its vehemence, and that the Tallmadge amendment, prohibiting further introduction of slavery there and providing for its gradual extinction, actually passed the House and almost the Senate, we cannot believe that it was Garrison and his disciples that aroused the Northern conscience. But we can confidently affirm that by abuse, which was too often slander, they intensified Southern feeling both among

⁴²Rhodes, Vol. II, p. 435.

Southern statesmen like John Randolph, who frankly avowed the evils of slavery, as well as among others like Jefferson Davis, who saw in it nothing but blessings, and thus in a very large measure unintentionally shaped the means by which abolition was consummated, namely Civil War. But that this fact entitles them to very great praise from the historian we seriously doubt; just as one may also doubt whether it was even conducive to quicken emancipation, stifling, as it did, the abolition sentiment which had previously prevailed in the border states.⁴³ One must be prejudiced indeed to withhold the tribute of admiration from the courage, the humanity, the self-sacrifice which so many abolitionists displayed in an eminent degree on so many occasions. But we do not believe we strain credulity or misstate history when we assert that, from the day of its delivery to the emancipation proclamation, Webster's reply to Hayne played a larger part in every national event related to slavery than did all the writings, speeches, lectures, and labors of all the abolitionists combined. It has been well said that, "It was not 'no union with slaveholders' but it was 'liberty and union' that won." ⁴⁴

It is a lasting and convincing proof of the good sense and judgment of the American people that now, when the passions of war have cooled and the animosity of sections subsided, they have withheld their homage equally from the Phillipses of one side and the Yanceys of the other and have selected as the most ideal and commanding figure of that period the man who said, "I do not suffer by the South; I suffer with the South." If one should wish to gauge the true calibre of Wendell Phillips, let him follow out a comparison several times before suggested in this article. Let him read the first and second inaugural of Abraham Lincoln and the speeches made at the same time by Phillips. Let him read the Gettysburg address and then imagine what Phillips would have said under the same circumstances. In spite of the purity and loftiness of his motives and the nobility of a lifetime spent unceasingly and ungrudgingly in the

⁴³ See Webster's Seventh of March Speech.

⁴⁴ Rhodes, Vol. I, p. 161.

interest of others, Phillips was essentially incapable of uttering that sublime sentiment of the second inaugural,—“With malice toward none; with charity for all.” When one contemplates Lincoln he beholds a wise and discerning statesman and a lovely and benevolent man. When one contemplates Phillips he beholds an extremist—a brilliant, interesting, and in many respects, an admirable extremist—but an extremist nevertheless; and in the plan of world-civilization, extremists have little share and that share is mainly for the bad.

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